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ART. VI.—*Life and Writings of Crabbe.*

*Life and Poetical Works of the Reverend* GEORGE CRABBE. In 8 volumes. Vol. I. *Containing the Life of Crabbe.* By his SON. London. 1834.

ROUSSEAU declared that he must visit the man who had witnessed two summers in a single year; and readers in general will be glad to learn something of the personal history of one, who, after receiving the applause of Burke and Johnson, remained silent for more than twenty years, and came forth at last to receive the homage of another generation. In truth, when we speak of Crabbe, we feel as if we were speaking of one who belonged rather to the last century, than to ours; yet there is no other poet, whom the public have known so favorably and so long, of whose history they know so little; and his son has performed an acceptable service, as well as a filial duty, in treasuring up all that can now be remembered of a man of great ability and worth,—of a poet, distinguished for his manly and original powers. We shall avail ourselves of the contents of this volume, in order to present such a sketch of the prominent incidents of the life of Mr. Crabbe, as may be required to illustrate a cursory view of his writings.

Mr. Crabbe was born at Aldborough, on the Christmas eve of 1754. The circumstances of his family were very humble, and he has himself told us, with good humored sarcasm, of the vanity of one of his ancestors, who endeavored to repair in some degree the unkindness of fortune, by dignifying the family name, originally Crab, with the addition of two final letters. His father, after passing several years in the itinerant occupation of a schoolmaster, was at length installed in the offices of warehouse-keeper, and deputy-collector of the port of Aldborough, to which he afterwards added that of collector of the salt duties, or salt-master, as this officer is usually denominated. He appears to have united many valuable traits of character with repulsive sternness and severity; while his wife, on the other hand, to whom Crabbe often alludes in terms of affectionate veneration, was one of those beautiful examples of retiring Christian virtue, which, like the most delicate flowers, are rarely found but in the shade. There

was little in the aspect of his native village to charm a poet's fancy : it was a barren and deserted spot, situated between the base of a low cliff and the shore of the German ocean ; its dwellings were like those which are not unfrequently seen on the sands of our own coast, appearing as if drawn up at anchor on the shore ; and it was peopled by a wild and amphibious race of fishermen and sailors, competently versed in the accomplishments which are apt to beset the men of perilous adventure. The landscape, notwithstanding the attempt made by some hardy poet to describe it as a scene of beauty, presented little to the eye excepting a desolate succession of unbroken heath and sand, enlivened with a meagre covering of weeds and rushes ; there was in fact nothing in the prospect to excite or fire the poetical imagination, but the ever varying aspect of the ocean, on which, as is obvious from all Crabbe's writings, he loved to dwell. The social aspect of his residence was, if possible, still less inviting than the face of nature. His home was rendered sad and desolate by the harshness of his father ; and there were none abroad among whom his own tastes could find the least encouragement or sympathy. His youthful proficiency in the art of managing a fishing boat was so indifferent, that his father would sometimes ask, in the bitterness of his heart, 'What that *thing* would ever be good for?' It should be stated, however, that the father had sense enough to discover the talent of his son, and, as the latter afterwards acknowledged with gratitude, labored to provide him with such means of education as his own limited resources would allow. But the literary toleration of the salt-master did not extend to so crying a heresy as poetry : he was a subscriber to some philosophical magazine, the gravity of whose pages was regularly enlivened with a score or two of verses ; these it was his custom to cut out when he sent the numbers to be bound, and they were treasured up as a rich possession by his son, who found in them his first models of the art, in which he afterwards excelled.

In his eleventh or twelfth year, after having attended a village school, for what period we are not informed, he was removed to another, where he was expected to prepare himself to become apprentice to a surgeon. He is said here to have exhibited a decided taste for mathematical pursuits, as well as for poetry, in which he made his first essay in the form of a salutary caution to a school girl, not to suffer herself

to be too much elated by the triumph of displaying new ribbons on her bonnet. Some time elapsed, after he left this school, before he could find an opportunity of entering upon the business he intended to pursue. A portion of this time was spent in musing, in his solitary walks by the sea shore ; but the greater part was occupied in piling butter and cheese on the quay at Aldborough, under the direction of his father, who entertained no great opinion of idleness, and least of all that which was consecrated to poetic dreams. This occupation was long remembered by the poet with little satisfaction. At length, in his fourteenth year, the long expected opportunity was presented ; and he set forth, with a heavy heart, to become apprentice to a surgeon at Wickham Brook. His pursuits, even there, were not wholly of a scientific kind ; his master distributed his time impartially between the arts of husbandry and healing, and his apprentice was the bed-fellow and fellow-laborer of his plough boy. In this way, he passed about two years ; then he removed to a more eligible situation, to complete the term of his apprenticeship under the direction of a surgeon at Woolridge, a few miles distant from his native village. Poetry still continued to occupy a large share of his attention : he was never much in love with his profession, though he devoted himself to it with tolerable earnestness. He found a source of inspiration, which youthful poets never wait for long, in an attachment which he here formed for the niece of a wealthy farmer, who twelve years afterwards became his wife, and in the mean time stimulated his literary zeal by encouragement, which proved in the result to be both fortunate and wise. A small premium for a poem on the subject of Hope, was offered by the proprietor of some Ladies' Magazine : this prize it was his fortune to gain, and the success, trifling as it was, set all the springs of his poetical enthusiasm in motion. It was here, also, that he published a poem, entitled ' Inebriety,' a name of no particular attraction ; this work is said to exhibit much facility of versification and maturity of thought, but attracted little notice at the time.

Mr. Crabbe's term of apprenticeship ended in 1775 ; he then returned to Aldborough, hoping to find some means of completing his professional education in London ; but his father's means were inadequate to this demand, as well as to maintaining him in idleness at home : he returned therefore to his old labors at the warehouse, which were rendered doubly irk-

some by new circumstances of domestic sorrow. The habits of his father had undergone that change, which fills the cup of affliction to the brim ; and the health of his mother, in whose happiness his own was bound up, was sinking under a fatal and quick decline. Impelled less by choice than a sense of its necessity, he devoted himself with more zeal than before to the study of his profession, and the sciences connected with it ; particularly botany, which was then and afterwards his favorite pursuit. At length his father found the means of sending him to London, with a purse too slender to attend lectures or to walk the hospitals, and only with the hope, as he himself said, of picking up a little surgical knowledge as cheaply as he could. In the course of a few months, he returned to Aldborough, but with no propitious change in his prospects or his fortune. There he became assistant to a surgeon, who soon retired from the village, and left him at liberty to set up for himself : but he had a rival in the field, and his own practice was the least productive which the place afforded. His patients, who saw his botanical researches, thought it unreasonable that they should be called upon to pay for medicines collected in the fields and ditches. On the whole, his prospects were not very encouraging, and not the least of his afflictions was a sense of his deficiency in professional knowledge and skill. A transient gleam of sunshine broke out in 1778, when the Warwickshire militia were quartered in his neighborhood, with whose officers, as their medical attendant, he formed some useful intimacies. He felt, however, that Aldborough was no place for him, and resolved to take the earliest opportunity to leave it. It was late in the year 1779, at the close of a cold and gloomy day, when, as he was wandering on the bleak cliff above the village, he determined to abandon his profession, and embark on the uncertain sea of literary adventure. He stopped before a shallow, muddy sheet of water, as dark and desolate as his own thoughts, and, as he gazed upon it, resolved to go to London and to venture all.

His prospects must have indeed been melancholy, to impel him to a resolution, apparently so hopeless. His health was not firm,—the reception of his poetical attempts had not been flattering, and his nerves were ill calculated to wrestle with adversity. There was not a single friend in the metropolis, on whom he could rely for aid. He had also to endure the reproaches of his father, who did not, however, labor much to

change his purpose. The means of effecting it were yet to be found ; his own immediate friends were unable or unwilling to supply them, and he applied to Mr. Dudley North, to whom his father had been useful in some political canvass, for the loan of five pounds. The letter, in which he made the application, was afterwards described by that gentleman as a very extraordinary one : his request was readily granted ; and, with three pounds in his pocket, a case of surgical instruments, and a box of clothing, the whole stock of his worldly fortune, he embarked on board a little sloop, and took his way to London.

It was in the year 1780, that he reached that city ; a propitious period, as his biographer remarks, for an adventurer in poetry, if indeed the good fortune of a poet can be said to consist in the absence of a rival. Goldsmith, Gray, and Churchill were dead ; Johnson had long before abandoned poetry, and was drawing near the close of his eminent career ; the genius of Cowper, which bloomed, like the witch-hazel, in the late autumn of his years, had not yet been revealed ; and the echo of the fame of Burns had hardly crossed the Scottish border. His biographer is, however, mistaken, if he supposes that the demand for poetry in the literary market is governed by the extent of the supply ; and who was to assure the young adventurer, that he could fill the vacant place in the admiration of the world ? He came without a patron ; he could claim but a single acquaintance in London, and she was the wife of a linen draper in Cornhill, not particularly likely to forward his literary projects, though kind and liberal in her attentions. He took lodgings at the house of a hairdresser, near the Exchange, and set himself, with a firm and manly spirit, about the doubtful task before him ; first transcribing the poetical pieces he brought with him from the country, composing one or two dramas and essays in prose, and laboring to improve his versification, and to become familiar with such books as he found at his command. Some of his intimates, at this period, were in circumstances not unlike his own, and were similarly fortunate in their subsequent life. Among them was Mr. Bonnycastle, late master of the Military Academy at Woolwich, and Isaac Dalby and Reuben Barrow, both mathematicians of distinguished eminence. It deserves to be recorded to his honor, that during this period, while he was tortured by anxiety and depressed by poverty, he kept his mind always fixed on the object of his pursuit, neither yielding to

the sore temptations of adverse fortune, nor ever sinking in despondency. Some of his pieces were offered to the booksellers, and were rejected ; he tried new subjects, and labored still harder than before, but with no better success. An anonymous poem, called 'The Candidate,' was published at his own charge, but found no public welcome ; and the failure of his bookseller compelled him to take refuge in the last shelter to which a sensitive mind can resort, an application for pecuniary aid to strangers. For this he first applied to Lord North, but in vain ; a similar appeal to Lord Shelburne produced no answer. After addressing several letters to that coarsest of illustrious personages, Lord Chancellor Thurlow, he received a cold reply, purporting that his lordship's avocations left him no leisure to read verses. In his journal, written at this time, he says : 'I have parted with my money, sold my wardrobe, pawned my watch, am in debt to my landlord, and finally, am at some loss how to eat a week longer.' Another extract from the same journal will afford an idea of the spirit and temper, with which he bore himself under these hard circumstances. 'It is the vilest thing in the world to have but one coat. My only one has met with a mischance, and how to manage it is some difficulty. A confounded stove's modish ornament caught its elbow, and rent it half away. Pinioned to the side it came home, and I ran deploring to my loft. In the dilemma, it occurred to me to turn tailor myself, but how to get materials to work with puzzled me. At last I went running down in a hurry, with three or four sheets of paper in my hand, and begged for a needle and thread to sew them together. This finished my job, and, but that it is somewhat thicker, the elbow is a good one yet.' The portion of the journal given in this volume, is quite valuable, as presenting a picture of a manly spirit, tried by a kind of suffering, which the heart of every one will tell him is severe. There is nothing of querulousness in it : no more of despondency, than the circumstances of his situation could not fail to excite ; it betrays throughout the energies of a strong mind, and the tranquillity of a religious one. Mr. Crabbe's repeated applications to *ex officio* patrons having thus proved fruitless, he resolved to make one final effort : and he fortunately directed himself to one, who was as much above the hereditary or created peers around him in generous feeling, as he was in the miraculous endowments of his mind. He addressed the following letter to Edmund Burke.

‘Sir, I am sensible, that I need even your talents to apologize for the freedom I now take ; but I have a plea which, however simply urged, will, with a mind like yours, Sir, procure me pardon : I am one of those outcasts on the world, who are without a friend, without employment, and without bread.

‘Pardon me a short preface. I had a partial father, who gave me a better education than his broken fortune would have allowed ; and a better than was necessary, as he could give me that only. I was designed for the profession of physic ; but not having wherewithal to complete the requisite studies, the design but served to convince me of a parent’s affection, and the error it had occasioned. In April last I came to London, with three pounds, and flattered myself this would be sufficient to supply me with the common necessities of life, till my abilities would procure me more ; of these I had the highest opinion, and a poetical vanity contributed to my delusion. I knew little of the world, and had read books only ; I wrote, and fancied perfection in my compositions ; when I wanted bread they promised me affluence, and soothed me with dreams of reputation, whilst my appearance subjected me to contempt.

‘Time, reflection and want have showed me my mistake. I see my trifles in that which I think the true light ; and whilst I deem them such, have yet the opinion that holds them superior to the common run of poetical publications.

‘I had some knowledge of the late Mr. Nassau, the brother of Lord Rochford ; in consequence of which I asked his Lordship’s permission to inscribe my little work to him. Knowing it to be free from all political allusions and personal abuse, it was no very material point to me to whom it was dedicated. His Lordship thought it none to him, and obligingly consented to my request.

‘I was told that a subscription would be the more profitable method for me, and therefore endeavored to circulate copies of the enclosed Proposals.

‘I am afraid, Sir, I disgust you with this very dull narration, but believe me punished in the misery that occasions it. You will conclude that, during this time, I must have been at more expense than I could afford ; indeed the most parsimonious could not have avoided it. The printer deceived me, and my little business has had every delay. The people with whom I live perceive my situation, and find me to be indigent and without friends. About ten days since, I was compelled to give a note for seven pounds, to avoid an arrest for about double that sum which I owe. I wrote to every friend I had, but my friends are poor likewise ; the time of payment approached, and I ventured



to represent my case to Lord Rochford. I begged to be credited for this sum till I received it of my subscribers, which I believe will be within one month; but to this letter I had no reply, and I have probably offended by my importunity. Having used every honest means in vain, I yesterday confessed my inability, and obtained with much entreaty, and as the greatest favor, a week's forbearance, when I am positively told, that I must pay the money, or prepare for a prison.

'You will guess the purpose of so long an introduction. I appeal to you, Sir, as a good, and, let me add, a great man. I have no other pretensions to your favor than that I am an unhappy one. It is not easy to support the thoughts of confinement; and I am coward enough to dread such an end to my suspense.

'Can you, Sir, in any degree, aid me with propriety?—Will you ask any demonstrations of my veracity? I have imposed upon myself, but I have been guilty of no other imposition. Let me, if possible, interest your compassion. I know those of rank and fortune are teased with frequent petitions, and are compelled to refuse the requests even of those whom they know to be in distress: it is, therefore, with a distant hope I venture to solicit such a favor: but you will forgive me, Sir, if you do not think proper to relieve. It is impossible that sentiments like yours can proceed from any but a humane and generous heart.

'I will call upon you, Sir, to-morrow, and if I have not the happiness to obtain credit with you, I must submit to my fate. My existence is a pain to myself, and every one near and dear to me is distressed in my distresses. My connexions, once the source of happiness, now embitter the reverse of my fortune, and I have only to hope a speedy end to a life so unpromisingly begun: in which (though it ought not to be boasted of) I can reap some consolation from looking to the end of it. I am, Sir, with the greatest respect, your obedient and most humble servant,

GEORGE CRABBE.'

It is not easy to read any thing relating to Edmund Burke, without pausing for a moment, to indulge in the thousand recollections, which gather round his name. He was a man, whose like has been seldom seen in the sphere of human intelligences, and will not soon be seen again. Almost in his youth, he rose to that elevated point of philosophical reputation, of which his adopted country has not many examples to show; and shortly afterwards, he stood without a rival in the long line of her living or departed orators;—beyond and above them all in that affluence of thought, deep practical sagacity, and surpassing glory of rhetorical ornament, which make the

voice of real eloquence as commanding in future ages, as in the moment of its most important victories. He combined the fervor of the most generous enthusiasm, with unerring insight into all the springs and sources of human character and action; deep scorn of all that was low and sordid with constant solicitude to advance the well-being of his race: and it might almost be considered a triumph of our nature, that one so highly gifted should have been so disinterested and confiding, so earnest in the cause of human happiness and right. It may be, that some of his political views, weighed in our balances and measured by our standards, are found wanting; but such a mind could not but be noble in its very errors; they were errors of judgment and not imperfections of the heart: they were the wreaths of mist, which intercept the glories of the morning sun, while they are kindled into beauty by its light. It was indeed a generous and manly spirit, to which the affecting appeal of the young adventurer was made. Men, who are engaged in conducting the destinies of nations, have rarely leisure to attend to individual concerns; the wholesale good which occupies their thoughts seems to acquit them of the obligation to be benevolent by retail. At this period, the mind of Mr. Burke was much absorbed in the fierce struggles of parliamentary war. His pecuniary circumstances were by no means those of affluence: of the pride or vanity of being deemed a patron, he had absolutely none; his charities were so unobtrusive, that he evidently thought them nothing more than daily acts of duty. There was probably nothing very peculiar in the circumstances of Mr. Crabbe; claims of equal strength, so far as his could then be known, might not unfrequently be held forth by others: he presented himself to Mr. Burke only as a young man of merit in distress. ‘He went,’ says his son, ‘into Mr. Burke’s room, a poor young adventurer, spurned by the opulent, and rejected by the publishers, his last shilling gone, and all but his last hope with it: he came out virtually secure of almost all the good fortune that, by successive steps, afterwards fell to his lot:—his genius acknowledged by one whose verdict could not be questioned,—his character and manners appreciated and approved by a noble and capacious heart, whose benevolence knew no limits but its power,—that of a giant in intellect, who was, in feeling, an unsophisticated child,—a bright example of the close affinity between superlative talents, and the warmth of the generous affections.’ Mr.

Burke immediately received him under his roof, and proceeded to examine his compositions, with the view of selecting a portion of them for the press. ‘The Library,’ and ‘The Village,’ appeared to him best suited to his purpose; he took the manuscripts himself to Dodsley, and gave the whole weight of his critical decision in their favor. The worthy bookseller indeed declined to take the hazard of the publication, but used every effort to procure for them a rapid sale, and uniformly treated the author with a liberality, which was always gratefully acknowledged. Of these poems, ‘The Library’ was published first, and was shortly afterwards followed by ‘The Village.’ The latter is a much better example of Crabbe’s peculiar power, than the former; we shall therefore detain our readers for a moment by some remarks upon its style and character.

It was the principal object of the writer to represent rural character, and scenery, and manners as they are, without much regard to that rule of taste, which rejects from the picture all those incidents, which might impair its pleasing and harmonious effect. The venerable pastoral had been transported from old times and other climates, just as Chinese pagodas and Grecian temples are erected to embellish the pleasure grounds of an English nobleman, giving an artificial aspect to the scene, quite at variance with the purposes of nature. It was cherished by modern poets with as much zeal, as the French dramatists adhere to their Greek model, and of course was cold and unnatural to those, whose imaginations were too faint to clothe the fields of Albion with the verdure of Arcadia, or to convert ploughmen and day laborers into the musing shepherds of the golden age. Gay’s Pastorals, intentionally coarse and ludicrous as they are, are more true to nature than those of Pope; because these were never designed to be faithful to nature, but only to present a pleasing copy of a work of ancient art. Goldsmith’s descriptions have more of truth about them, but the sunlight rests on these as on our landscape in the Indian summer; there is a soft haze which veils the ruder features of the prospect, and the dreary sky and gathering storm are kept entirely from the view. Crabbe’s error was just the opposite one; he was himself familiar with all the dark shades of village life, and in his own depressed and sad circumstances, they occupied and filled his imagination; he had himself experienced what others only sung, and had found it cheerless as the valley of the shadow of death. We all

know how much our impressions of scenery and modes of life are governed by our feelings ; the brightest sun is cold and melancholy to the mourner, and the dreariest landscape pleasing to the eye, when we ourselves are happy. Crabbe saw the country without pleasure, and left it without regret ; to him it presented no recollections but those of disappointed hope : and he accordingly describes it with a stern and powerful hand, without compunction or mercy, and with colors too severely true.

‘The Village’ opens with a merciless rebuke of the ‘fond Corydons,’ who have studiously disregarded truth and nature in their pictures of rural life. The author avows his determination to reveal those real ills, which have been hitherto concealed beneath the vain trappings of poetic pride ; and he forthwith proceeds to display a picture of his own,—not of green woods and sunny streams, of an innocent and artless race,—but a delineation, as powerful and vivid as it is repulsive, of the barren heaths of his native village, and the beings who inhabit it.

‘Lo ! where the heath, with withering brake grown o’er,  
Lends the light turf that warms the neighboring poor :  
From thence a length of burning sand appears,  
Where the thin harvest waves its withered ears ;  
Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,  
Reign o’er the land, and rob the blighted rye ;  
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,  
And to the ragged infant threaten war ;  
There poppies, nodding, mock the hope of toil ;  
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil ;  
Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,  
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;  
O’er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,  
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade ;  
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,  
And a sad splendor vainly shines around.  
So looks the maid, whom wretched arts adorn,  
Betrayed by man, then left for man to scorn :  
Whose cheek in vain assumes the mimic rose,  
While her sad eyes the troubled breast disclose ;  
Whose outward splendor is but folly’s dress,  
Exposing most, when most it gilds distress.  
Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,  
With sullen wo displayed in every face ;

Who far from civil arts and social fly,  
And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.'

These are scenes, in which nature has been sparing of her bounty ; the poet now turns to those where plenty smiles ; but there, too, he finds a contrast between apparent comfort and real misery, which throws the latter into even deeper shade. The laborers hoard up aches and anguish for their declining years by exposure to the sun and storm ; they toil with earnestness, hoping to forget their wretchedness in the strong effort of manly pride ; yet they sink to the earth beneath that hopeless poverty, which murders peace ; and go down at last, worn and weary, into forsaken and unhonored age. The gates of the village poor house are thrown open to receive its most unwelcome guests.

' There is yon house that holds the parish poor,  
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door ;  
There, where the putrid vapors, flagging, play,  
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day :—  
There children dwell who know no parents' care ;  
Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there !  
Heart-broken matrons, on their joyless bed,  
Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed :  
Dejected widows, with unheeded tears,  
And crippled age, with more than childhood's fears :  
The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they !  
The moping idiot and the madman gay.  
Here, too, the sick their final doom receive,  
Here brought, amid the scene of grief, to grieve,  
Where the loud groans from some sad chamber flow,  
Mixed with the clamors of the crowd below ;  
Here, sorrowing, they each kindred sorrow scan,  
And the cold charities of man to man :  
Whose laws indeed for reverend age provide,  
And strong compulsion plucks the scrap from pride ;  
But still that scrap is bought with many a sigh,  
And pride embitters what it can't deny.'

Here is in truth a mass of misery, which reminds one of Virgil's description of the gate of Tartarus. The village doctor, with fate and physic in his eye, enters this abode of wretchedness, to insult the victim, whom he means to kill ; hurries over some habitual queries, without waiting for a reply, and rushes to the door, leaving his patient to sink into the grave. The dying poor man asks the consolations of religion, and the murmuring nurse reluctantly summons the parish priest :

‘ A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday’s task  
As much as God or man can fairly ask :  
The rest he gives to loves and labors light,  
To fields the morning, and to feasts the night ;  
None better skilled the noisy pack to guide,  
To urge their chase, to cheer them or to chide :  
A sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,  
And, skilled at whist, devotes the night to play ;  
Then, while such honors bloom around his head,  
Shall he sit sadly by the sick man’s bed,  
To raise the hope he feels not, or with zeal  
To combat fears that ev’n the pious feel? ’

Death comes at last, in a form far less repulsive than that of the overseer or church warden ; the rejoicing parish cheerfully pay the frugal fees of interment ; the mourners, ‘ sedately torpid and devoutly dumb,’ enter the church ; the fox-hunting priest is too busy to perform the last religious offices over one so humble, and the unblest remains are committed to the dust. This is the destiny of the aged and the friendless ; but what is the condition of the young, who, if any can be so, are full of enjoyment and of hope ? They have some brief intervals of leisure and tranquillity, when the sabbath returns ; but their employer is all the while murmuring at the exactions of Providence in demanding tithes, in addition to one day in seven. The stillness of the day of rest is broken by the clamor of vulgar debauchery : slander pours its bitterness into the shallow cup of pleasure ; and the day closes with ale-house squabbles and coarse licentiousness.

Such is the portrait of rural life, given by a poet of originality and power ; by one, who had seen what he described, and had sufficient purity of purpose to intend, at least, to describe it faithfully. Every one will see, from the sketches and the extracts we have given, that it is a dark and powerful representation, designed to shadow forth the same forbidding views of life, which are so vividly displayed in the prose and poetry of Johnson. Life is a sphere, of which the pastoral poets saw only the brilliant side, while Crabbe, at this period, was familiar only with the dark one ; they all wanted some moral Mercator’s projection, by which both hemispheres might be at once presented to the eye. We doubt whether either can produce a happy moral influence ;—in order to do this, they must carry with them a conviction of their truth. Mr. Crabbe

inverted the maxims of the Greek painter, in the execution of his portrait of the Queen of Love ; instead of selecting and combining beauties, he left no blemish or deformity untouched, and produced a whole, every part of which might be true to nature, while its general impression was as false as it was frightful. But moral defects are the first to be forgiven : men were weary of the small poets who had undertaken to amuse them in the absence of the chief performers, and were glad to welcome one, who revived the ancient inspiration ; they saw in Crabbe a poet of real abilities, who, if he resorted to old themes, treated them in a manner rarely witnessed before ; they saw a model of versification, as finished and far more vigorous than that of Goldsmith, and inferior in his own language only to Pope. No wonder, under these circumstances, that the impression which he made was strong and lasting. His poems, at this period, were however brief and few : and those of his later years are so different in character, and so much more varied than these, that it would be wholly out of place here to offer any general remarks upon his rank and ability as a poet. We shall therefore pursue the brief sketch, which we proposed to give of the prominent incidents of his life.

The liberality of Mr. Burke was equally active and unwearyed. At his table, Mr. Crabbe became intimately known to that illustrious circle, of which his friend was the chief ornament,—to Reynolds, Fox, and Johnson,—all of whom appear to have appreciated his abilities, and to have treated him with marked respect and kindness. Johnson, in particular, whose critical word was law, read ‘The Village’ in manuscript, and pronounced upon it a panegyric, of which he was never very prodigal. The views of life which it presented, so similar, as we have already intimated, to his own, may have been in some degree the cause of this complacency ; but however this may have been, the eulogy was just ; and when Johnson applauded, the lesser critics felt entirely safe in joining in the chorus. Even the Lord Chancellor, to whom Crabbe, after the rejection of his application, had addressed a severe poetical remonstrance, now requested an interview, at which he addressed him with the words, ‘The first poem you sent to me, Sir, I ought to have noticed,—and I heartily forgive the second.’ He at the same time requested the satirist to accept a bank note of one hundred pounds, and assured him, that when he should take orders, which, by the advice of Mr. Burke, he

was about to do, more substantial evidences of regard should be afforded him. In the year 1781, his purpose was effected. He was ordained as a priest, and became a curate to the rector of his native village. On returning to Aldborough, under circumstances far different from those in which he left it, his reception was of a kind, which confirmed his early impressions of the character of rural life. His poetical reputation was not one, which the villagers were well calculated to appreciate; those jealousies and heartburnings, which are sure to follow the possessor of unexpected good fortune, made his residence uncomfortable; his excellent mother, to whom he not unfrequently alludes in his writings, with a tenderness and feeling, resembling those with which Pope has preserved the memory of the guardian of his early years, had sunk beneath affliction and disease; and his father had diminished the few comforts of his home by an alliance with one little calculated to repair the loss. After a brief sojourn, Mr. Crabbe accepted the place of domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, and took up his residence at Belvoir Castle. Some circumstances are related by his biographer, which tend to show that he was not inclined to regret the separation from his patron, which took place shortly after, on the departure of the Duke to assume the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

Just at this moment, the Lord Chancellor, after assuring him, with some of those emphatic asseverations with which his conversation was apt to be embroidered, that he was aslike Fielding's Parson Adams as twelve to a dozen, presented him with two small livings. He was now united in marriage to the early friend, who had watched his progress to competency and fame through many weary years. Not long afterwards, his old friend the Lord Chancellor, at the instigation of the Duchess of Rutland, and sorely against his inclination, gave him the living of Muston, in the vicinity of Belvoir Castle. On the first suggestion of this exchange, the keeper of the royal conscience had roundly sworn, that he would make it for no man in England; but a lady was the intercessor in this instance, so that there was no infraction of the vow. Here, in 1785, he published the 'Newspaper,' a brief and not very original satire; and then sunk into a repose, compared with which the slumber of the sleepers of Ephesus was of very brief duration. It was not until the expiration of twenty-two years, that his other poems began to be issued from the press.



This persevering silence, on the part of one, who had no reason to complain of a want of public favor, has occasioned much speculation ; we think, however, that it is more easily accounted for than his subsequent reappearance. It is very obvious, from the sketch of his character given in this volume, that he had no overweening confidence in his own powers : the encouragement of Burke and Johnson, to say nothing of the pressure of severe necessity, had overborne his scruples hitherto ; but that spur to effort was removed, and he had acquired a capital of fame sufficient for his wishes. Men of sensitive minds are not unfrequently less reluctant to see their stock diminishing by time, than to risk it on a doubtful venture ; they follow the example of Pope's father, who retired from business in the prime of life, deposited all his property in a stout iron chest, and went on expending, until his life and fortune came to an end together. Mr. Crabbe was not one of those who look on poetry as pastime. There were various other engagements to which he more readily inclined ; and he appears, also, to have been at all times scrupulous to permit nothing else to interfere with the rigorous discharge of duty. Goldsmith's beautiful description of the religious character of the priest of Sweet Auburn, would not have been inapplicable to him. He was always found at the bedside of the sick and dying ; his parishioners unanimously accorded to him the touching eulogy, that 'no sympathy was like his.' During the whole period of his duties as a country clergyman, he gratuitously gave to all the benefits of his old professional skill ; and his poetical reputation, great as it is, seems valueless in the comparison with that which he merits for the assiduous discharge of every moral and religious duty. Earthly fame has no rewards to offer, like those which follow him, who ministers with fidelity, however humbly, at the altar of God. Mr. Crabbe combined high intellectual gifts with an almost child-like simplicity. As a preacher, he was eloquent and impressive, and though very regardless of ceremony, entirely free from affectation. 'I must have some money, gentlemen,' was the public notice which his parishioners received of the approach of tithe day. If the evening began to fall before the conclusion of his discourse, he would remove to a pew near a window, and stand upon a bench to finish it ; these were not indications of a contempt of ordinary forms, but of the forgetfulness of one, who was too sincere to be solicitous about his manner.

We have just intimated, that Mr. Crabbe had no undue confidence in his own powers: he was at all times too ready to follow the advice of others, whose capacity and judgment were not equal to his own; and the world is probably a loser by this infirmity. Botany was always his favorite pursuit; he was scarcely ever without a flower in his hand, when the weather permitted him to go abroad; and he employed himself for some years in preparing an essay on this subject. It was written in English, and this the Vice-Master of Trinity College considered as nothing less than high treason against the majesty of the Latin tongue. This absurd suggestion discouraged him, and the work was never completed. Among his other avocations, was that of writing romances, for which he was in some respects eminently fitted; no man surpassed him in descriptive power and keen scrutiny of character, and we cannot doubt that his delineations would have been full of energy and truth. As ill fortune would have it, these too fell victims to domestic criticism. One of them was entitled 'Widow Grey,' but of this we have no memorial. A second bore the name of 'Reginald Glanshawe, or the man who commanded success.' It opened with a description of a wretched room, which his wife pronounced inferior in effect to similar descriptions in his poems; on this judicious hint, he made a bonfire of the whole. The early efforts of this lady to induce him to cultivate his poetical powers, are hardly sufficient to atone for her fatal gift of criticism in the present instance. Another sacrifice of the same kind was offered on his own account, perhaps in order to show his gratitude for the advice of his friends, by following it beyond both the spirit and the letter. This consisted of a series of poems which he had offered to Dodsley, who refused them.

We may as well say something here of Mr. Crabbe's domestic character. He was not without severe trials; for more than twenty years before her death, his wife was visited with severe disease, which seems, though her son makes little direct allusion to the subject, to have cast a partial shadow over her mind. His constant and attentive kindness to her, when kindness was almost wearied or repelled, is a beautiful trait; and the recollections of his son are full of many such amiable qualities. To the children, his approach was always a signal for delight; benevolence was in fact his distinguishing characteristic; he entered with a mild and delicate interest into the

feelings of every one around him. Men are apt to forget, when they speak of extraordinary virtue, that they in general refer to some single act, or occasional exhibition of exalted qualities: but the virtue, after all, which passes that of martyrs, flows from a living and perennial spring, flashing ever in the sunlight of a cheerful temper, and sending its fertilizing stream through all the dark places and deserts of the way. 'I can still see him,' says his son, 'in the eye of memory,—his fatherly countenance unmixed with any of the less loveable expressions, that in too many faces obscure that character, but preëminently *fatherly*: conveying the idea of kindness, intellect and purity; his manner grave, manly and cheerful, in unison with his high and open forehead; his very attitudes, whether as he sat absorbed in the arrangement of his minerals, shells and insects,—or as he labored in his garden until his naturally pale complexion acquired a tinge of fresh healthy red; or as, coming lightly toward us with some unexpected present, his smile of indescribable benevolence spoke exultation in the foretaste of our raptures.'

It would be of little interest to dwell upon Mr. Crabbe's changes of residence, or other circumstances, which are stated with considerable minuteness by his son: we pass therefore to the period, when his long silence was broken, and he again appeared to revive and confirm the original impression of his power. In the year 1806, he had nearly completed his 'Parish Register' for publication. Several years before, Mr. Fox had promised to revise his publications, and to afford him the advantage of his critical suggestions. The career of that great man was now drawing to a close; but he readily renewed his promise, and it gives additional interest to this poem to know, that it employed his mind almost in his last hours. In 1807, it appeared, together with 'Sir Eustace Grey,' the 'Birth of Flattery,' and other poems. Three years afterwards, appeared 'The Borough'; this was succeeded in 1812 by the 'Tales in Verse,' and in 1819 by the 'Tales of the Hall,' the last of his publications.

It has been already intimated, that there is a remarkable difference between Crabbe's early poems, and those of his maturer years: both have defects and excellencies of their own; the first are far superior to the later ones in polished beauty of versification, while they are less marked by those traits, which distinguish him from most of the other poets of

his country. The circumstances, which gave a sad and distorted coloring to his early views of life and manners, tended very strongly to impair the effect of his first productions; they excite our feelings less powerfully, because we know that the misery is partly of his own making. If a man choose the shady side of the way, he will naturally find occasion to complain of the absence of the sunbeams; but he will surely meet with little sympathy from those, who feel that there is no necessity for walking in the dark. In the long interval which elapsed before his reappearance as a writer, his circumstances had become materially altered for the better, and his views and feelings had undergone a corresponding change: he was in the enjoyment of a competent fortune; assiduously engaged in that discharge of duty, which brings with it an exceeding great reward, and possessed of some leisure to devote to that study of mankind, which can only be pursued by the contented and the tranquil. The miserable man, instead of studying others, dwells upon his own impulses and feelings, and from these infers how others think and act and feel; and there are few who do not wonder at the alterations in the aspect of the world around them, as their spirits rise or fall. Mr. Crabbe is said to have remarked, that he derived less pleasure from the contemplation of a beautiful prospect, than from standing in the highway, to watch the faces of the passers by; and the remark, we think, serves to afford an explanation of the character of his later writings. Natural beauty excites but a small share of his enthusiasm; it is rare for him to dwell on any lovely scene, though he occasionally describes those of an opposite character with great vividness: with the exception of the ocean, with which many of the associations of his childhood were connected, and whose changing aspects he portrays with remarkable force of coloring, the grand and beautiful in nature have few charms for him. Motives,—feelings,—passions,—all that relates to human character and action,—these are the points which he seizes on with a master's hand, and unfolds with a stern energy and truth, which convince us that he is engaged with no creations of fancy, but is describing what he has actually seen and studied. No English poet since the time of Shakspeare has painted those diversities of character, which one meets in the ordinary intercourse of life, with equal fidelity or with equal effect. He sees them not through a distorted medium,

nor within the shade of intervening objects : he has attained that point of philosophical elevation, neither so lofty as to confuse the sight, nor so low as to confine it, where every object appears in a true light and in its just proportions ; the results of his observation are neither things of speculation nor of fancy, but the strong, distinct, vivid portraitures of classes of our race.

Mr. Crabbe is certainly entitled to the praise of a reformer. Before his day, no poet would have dreamed of resorting to humble life for any thing beyond a theme of ludicrous caricature, or the personages of a Beggar's Opera. Even at the present time, critics are apt to shake their heads with looks of peculiar wisdom, when they come in contact with such innovations : they are willing to admit that ' The Borough ' is well enough in its way, but deem the effort to invest such subjects with poetical attraction as hopeless as to draw the living waters from the rock. The poets themselves have yielded to this prejudice, and instead of copying from nature, when they wish to introduce a peasant, have made him as unlike reality, as is the waxen image to the animated frame ; the man of their creation has no affinity with merely mortal flesh and blood. We might as well expect in real life to meet a phoenix, as one of their sentimental swains, musing in rapture as he goes forth to his daily task, or following the plough with unutterable joy and glory. We know that there is enough in humble life which has no claim to the title of poetical, and so there is in every other condition ; but we are not sure, that the materials of poetry are not more abundant in a lowly, than in an elevated sphere ; for feeling is there unfettered by those conventional restraints, which operate like law on natural freedom : the stern rebuke of opinion, which has as much power over those who move in the elevated social walks, as the eye of the keeper over the madman, loses its authority ; passion walks abroad without control, and the reluctant step of the slave is exchanged for the free and elastic movements of the mountaineer. So it is with the utterance of deep emotions ; the natural expression of feeling is never vulgar, and those who deem it so show only that they do not know what they condemn. When Scott, in his romances, puts the most energetic and affecting language into the mouths of his unlettered personages, he is entirely true to nature ; the gipsy's stern execration of the vain and unfeeling Bertram,—the language of

Edie Ochiltree, in the fearful night at Halket-head,—the eloquence with which the rude and generous Highland outlaw pours out the emotions of his inmost heart,—who can for a moment doubt that these are natural? On the contrary, it is nothing but their truth, which is the secret of their power; and the same simplicity and truth are the only agents, which produce the wonders attributed to Indian eloquence. The North American savage has no more literature than the meanest ‘bluegown’ of Scotland, and, as respects refinement, is not greatly his superior: but he gives utterance to his natural sentiments in the plainest and most unaffected language, and no conventional forms were ever half so powerful. Examples of this are familiar to the recollection of every reader; the speech of Logan has been most frequently quoted; but a more recent illustration occurs to us, which is perhaps not less striking. When the chief of the Sacs, Black Hawk, lately returned from his captivity to the tribe, which he had a few months before led forth to battle, but which was now crushed and broken, the agent of the United States expressed in council the views and expectations of the President. In the course of his reply, the warrior said: ‘On your way home, you will pass where my village once was. No one lives there now. All are gone!’ There is an interest connected with the Indian character, which, in the common estimation, gives more than usual force and impressiveness to their eloquence; but wherever strong feeling and manly sentiment are found, there will eloquence surely be found also; and these are peculiar to no class or condition.

It is true that the poet, who confines himself to the exhibition of humble life merely, can hardly expect a willing audience. Our interest is so much absorbed by the fortunes of the great, that it seems almost like presumption to ask it for the little; the writers of romance have been well aware of this prepossession, and have employed it for their own purposes; we see their heroes decorated with all the ornaments of rank and accomplishments and title, and bow down to them, as a matter of course. Mr. Burke says that this is natural; it certainly is second nature. Perhaps the world will in time grow wise enough to reserve that admiration for the exalted qualities of the heart and intellect, which has hitherto been lavished on adventitious ones; but that millenium has not yet begun. Undoubtedly, the distinctions which social life infallibly creates are not to be disregarded, but they may be seen

with a more just and equal eye ; the observer of human nature need not forget the high, while contemplating the lowly ; but he will do well to look abroad, when the outlines of the trees and mountains are distinctly marked on the clear blue sky, and not merely when they are magnified by the gorgeous drapery of mist. When all the exhalations of prejudice and of fashion shall have passed away, the moral interest will be more equally distributed among the different conditions of life. The simple energy and truth of Crabbe will be more valued by the many, than they have been heretofore ; if his intellectual vision does not, like that of the most glorious of the sons of light, comprehend all space, it will be acknowledged to be keen, wide, and faithful. Shakspeare, from his watchtower, caught every change of many-colored life ; the great volume of our nature was wide open before him ; and whether he unveils the humble bosom, or describes the fierce struggles of jealousy, ambition or remorse, or the sorrow quickened into madness of the credulous old king, no one ever thought of doubting that the portraiture was real. Crabbe generally aspired to no such wide extent of observation, though when he has attempted it, his success is complete ; he saw and studied all the beings around him with no less interest and care, than he pursued his researches into the secrets of inanimate nature ; and what he undertakes to describe, neither Scott nor Shakspeare could have painted better. His purpose is a moral one ; he never aims to dazzle or to please ; he conceals no defect, softens no deformity, and aims not to exaggerate a single beauty ; he makes few sacrifices on the altar of fastidious taste : whoever admires him, admires him for his plain truth and manly power. In these remarks, we refer of course to his later writings ; for the prevalent defect of the earlier ones has been already pointed out. As he went onward in the way of life, he became a cool, thoughtful, philosophical and somewhat sarcastic observer, with tolerable charity for human vice and folly, but with principle enough to describe them as they are.

The writings of Crabbe are not so familiar to the general reader, as to render it intrusive to attempt to illustrate our view of his poetical character by a few examples. In the 'Parish Register', he sketches the history of many of the villagers, combining tales of crime and sorrow with those of humble and unambitious virtue. There are several death-bed scenes, of which not the least curious is that of the bustling widow Goe.

“ Bless me ! I die, and not a warning given,  
 With *much* to do for earth, and *ALL* for Heaven !—  
 No reparation for my soul’s affairs,  
 No leave petitioned for the barn’s repairs ;  
 Accounts perplexed, my interest yet unpaid,  
 My mind unsettled, and my will unmade :—  
 A lawyer haste, and, in your way, a priest,  
 And let me die in one good work, at least.”  
 She speaks, and trembling dropped upon her knees,  
 Heaven in her eye, and in her hand the keys ;  
 And still the more she found her life decay,  
 With greater force she grasped those signs of sway ;  
 Then fell and died !—in haste her sons drew near  
 And dropped, in haste, the tributary tear,  
 Then from the adhering clasp the keys unbound,  
 And consolation for their sorrows found.’

Here is a sketch of the funeral of a very different example of her sex,—a pattern of unassuming virtue, who fell by the sudden blow of pestilence.

‘ Slowly they bore, with solemn step, the dead ;  
 When grief grew loud and bitter tears were shed ;  
 My part began ; a crowd drew near the place,  
 Awe in each eye, alarm in every face :  
 So swift the ill, and of so fierce a kind,  
 That fear with pity mingled in each mind ;  
 Friends with the husband came their griefs to blend,  
 For good-man Frankford was to all a friend.  
 The last-born boy they held above the bier,  
 He knew not grief, but cries expressed his fear.

\* \* \* \* \*

Arrived at home, how then they gazed around,  
 In every place, where she, no more, was found :—  
 The seat at table she was wont to fill ;  
 The fireside chair, still set, but vacant still ;  
 The garden walks, a labor all her own ;  
 The latticed bower, with trailing shrubs o’ergrown :  
 The Sunday pew she filled, with all her race,—  
 Each place of hers was now a sacred place,  
 That, while it called up sorrows in the eyes,  
 Pierced the full heart, and forced them still to rise.’

But these are not the strongest efforts of his pencil. At the risk of repeating what may be already quite familiar, we will give another example, which is equalled, we think, by few



in the whole compass of English poetry. Among the poor of the Borough, we have the history of Peter Grimes, the fisherman. In his youth, he treats his father with brutal harshness, becomes familiar with debauchery and crime, and is at length shunned by all his neighbors. Two apprentices are bound to him, whose death is supposed to be hastened by his constant cruelty, if not produced by more sudden violence. He becomes a solitary being, avoiding and avoided by all, and is at last the prey of remorse and madness. He is conveyed to the poor-house, where

‘ The priest attending found he spoke at times  
As one alluding to his fears and crimes :  
“ It was the fall,” he muttered, “ I can show  
The manner how,—I never struck a blow ; ”—  
And then aloud,—“ unhand me, free my chain ;  
On oath, he fell,—it struck him to the brain :—  
Why ask my father ?—that old man will swear  
Against my life ; besides, he was not there :—  
What, all agreed ?—am I to die to-day ?  
My Lord, in mercy, give me time to pray.” ’

In one of the paroxysms of delirium, he makes his fearful and mysterious revelation.

“ ‘ Twas one hot noon, all silent, still, serene,  
No living being I had lately seen ;  
I paddled up and down, and dipped my net,  
But such his pleasure I could nothing get—  
A father’s pleasure, when his toil was done,  
To plague and torture thus an only son !  
And so I sat and looked upon the stream,  
How it ran on, and felt as in a dream :  
But dream it was not ; no,—I fixed my eyes  
On the mid stream and saw the spirits rise.  
I saw my father on the water stand,  
And hold a thin pale boy in either hand,  
And there they glided ghastly on the top  
Of the salt flood, and never touched a drop ;  
I would have struck them, but they knew the intent,  
And smiled upon the oar, and down they went.  
Now from that day, whenever I began  
To dip my net, there stood the hard old man,—  
He and those boys : I humbled me and prayed  
They would be gone,—they heeded not, but stayed ;  
Nor could I turn, nor would the boat go by,

But gazing on the spirits, there was I ;  
 They bade me leap to death, but I was loath to die ;  
 And every day, as sure as day arose,  
 Would those three spirits meet me at the close ;  
 To hear and mark them daily was my doom,  
 And, "Come," they said, with weak, sad voices, "Come."

\* \* \* \* \*

In one fierce summer day, when my poor brain  
 Was burning hot, and cruel was my pain,  
 Then came this father-foe, and there he stood  
 With his two boys again upon the flood ;  
 There was more mischief in those eyes, more glee  
 In their pale faces when they glared at me ;  
 Still did they force me on the sea to rest,  
 And when they saw me fainting and oppressed,  
 He, with his hand, the old man, scooped the flood,  
 And there came flame about him mixed with blood ;  
 He bade me stoop and look upon the place,  
 Then flung the red hot liquor in my face ;  
 Burning it blazed, and then I roared for pain,  
 I thought the demons would have turned my brain.  
 Still there they stood, and forced me to behold  
 A place of horrors,—they cannot be told,—  
 When the flood opened, there I heard the shriek  
 Of tortured guilt,—no earthly tongue can speak ;  
 All days alike ! forever ! did they say,  
 And unremitted torments every day—  
 Yes, so they said ;"—but here he ceased, and gazed  
 On all around, affrightened and amazed ;  
 And still he tried to speak, and looked in dread  
 Of frightened females gathering round his bed ;  
 Then dropped exhausted and appeared at rest,  
 Till the strong foe the vital powers possessed ;  
 Then with an inward, broken voice he cried,  
 "Again they come," and muttered as he died.'

There is another most powerful delineation of madness in 'Sir Eustace Grey,' a brief sketch, but not inferior in power to any of Crabbe's writings. The scene is laid in a madhouse, where, in the presence of the physician and a visitor, the varying moods of madness are unveiled by the lunatic, Sir Eustace Grey himself. He describes himself as happy in the enjoyment of all earthly advantages, but forgetful of religious duty, until his wife deserted him for the arms of a treacherous friend, whom he murders under the impulse of revenge.

Madness comes on, the offspring of disgrace and poverty ; he is under the control of fiends, who torture him for years without an interval of rest ; till, worn out by the very excess of his delirium, he finds tranquillity at last in the belief that his iniquities are pardoned, and that he is redeemed by his Saviour from the foul tormenting fiends. He thus relates how, in the first period of their visitation, they hurried him over sea and land to a boundless plain.

‘ There was I fixed, I know not how,  
Condemned for years untold to stay ;  
Yet years were not ;—one dreadful *now*  
Endured no change of night or day ;  
The same mild evening’s sleeping ray  
Shone softly-solemn and serene,  
And all that time I gazed away,  
The setting sun’s sad rays were seen.

‘ At length a moment’s sleep stole on,—  
Again came my commissioned foes ;  
Again through sea and land we’re gone,  
No peace, no respite, no repose ;  
Above the dark broad sea we rose,  
We ran through bleak and frozen land ;  
I had no strength their strength t’ oppose,  
An infant in a giant’s hand.

‘ They placed me where those streamers play,  
Those nimble beams of brilliant light :  
It would the strongest heart dismay,  
To see, to feel that dreadful sight :  
So swift, so pure, so cold, so bright,  
They pierced my frame with icy wound,  
And all that half-year’s polar night,  
Those dancing streamers wrapped me round.

‘ Slowly that darkness passed away,  
When down upon the earth I fell,—  
Some hurried sleep was mine by day ;  
But, soon as tolled the evening bell,  
They forced me on, where ever dwell  
Far distant men in cities fair,  
Cities of which no trav’lers tell,  
Nor feet but mine were wanderers there.

‘ Their watchmen stare, and stand aghast  
As on we hurry through the dark ;

'The watch-light blinks as we go past,  
   The watch-dog shrinks and fears to bark :  
 The watch-tower's bell sounds shrill ;—and, hark !  
   The free wind blows,—we've left the town,—  
 A wide sepulchral ground I mark,  
   And on a tombstone place me down.  
 ' What monuments of mighty dead !  
   What tombs of various kinds are found !  
 And stones erect their shadows shed  
   On humble graves, with wickers bound ;  
 Some risen fresh above the ground,  
   Some level with the native clay ;  
 What sleeping millions wait the sound,  
   " Arise, ye dead, and come away ! "

' Alas ! they stay not for that call ;  
   Spare me this wo ! ye demons, spare !  
 They come ! the shrouded shadows all,—  
   'Tis more than mortal brain can bear :  
 Rustling they rise, they sternly glare  
   At man, upheld by vital breath,  
 Who, led by wicked fiends, should dare  
   To join the shadowy troops of death.'

We can insert hardly enough of this poem, to give any just idea of its power. His biographer tells us that it was written during a severe snow-storm ; a fact, which may be of considerable importance to those, who are anxious to discover the seasons most propitious to poetical inspiration. It is far more wild and imaginative than any of his other writings, and shews a versatility of talent, which those who are acquainted only with the most familiar portions of them would scarcely have anticipated. Before we leave this subject, we are unwilling to pass by the tribute paid to his ability by Sir Walter Scott. It is interesting, no less as a full and striking testimony to his merit, by one whose favorable judgment was of no ordinary value, than as an example of the kindness and liberality of feeling of the great man, whose character is as honorable to our nature, as his writings are to the literature of his country. The following is an extract from a letter, written by him in reply to one of Crabbe, accompanying a present of a copy of the ' Parish Register.'

' Ashestiel, October 21, 1809.

' I am just honored with your letter, which gives me the more sensible pleasure, since it has gratified a wish of more than twen-

ty years' standing. It is, I think, fully that time since I was, for great part of a very snowy winter, the inhabitant of an old house in the country, in a course of poetical study, so very like that of your admirably painted "Young Lad," that I could hardly help saying, "That's me!" when I was reading the tale to my family. Among the very few books which fell under my hands, was a volume or two of Dodsley's Annual Register, one of which contained copious extracts from "The Village," and "The Library;" particularly the conclusion of book first of the former, and an extract from the latter, beginning with the description of the old Romances. I committed them most faithfully to my memory, where your verses must have felt themselves very strangely lodged in company with ghost-stories, border-riding ballads, scraps of old plays, and all the miscellaneous stuff, which a strong appetite for reading, with neither means nor discrimination for selection, had assembled in the head of a lad of eighteen. New publications, at that time, were very rare in Edinburgh, and my means of procuring them very limited; so that, after a long search for the poems which contained these beautiful specimens, and which had afforded me so much delight, I was fain to rest contented with extracts from the Register, which I could repeat at this moment. You may, therefore, guess my sincere delight, when I saw your poems at a later period assume the rank in the public consideration which they so well deserve. It was a triumph to my own immature taste to find I had anticipated the applause of the learned and of the critical, and I became very desirous to offer my *gratulator*, among the more important plaudits which you have had from every quarter. I should certainly have availed myself of the freemasonry of authorship,—(for our trade may claim to be a mystery, as well as Abhorson's) to address to you a copy of a new poetical attempt, which I have now upon the anvil, and I esteem myself particularly obliged to Mr. Hatchard, and to your goodness acting on his information, for giving me the opportunity of paving the way for such a freedom. I am too proud of the compliments you honor me with, to affect to decline them: and with respect to the comparative view I have of my own labors and yours, I can only assure you, that none of my little folks, about the formation of whose taste and principles I may be supposed naturally solicitous, have ever read any of my own poems, while yours have been our regular evening's entertainment. My eldest girl begins to read well, and enters as well into the humor as the sentiment of your admirable descriptions of human life. As for rivalry, I think it has seldom existed among those who know, by experience, that there are much better things in the world than literary reputation, and that one of the

best of these good things is the regard and friendship of those deservedly esteemed for their worth or their talents. I believe many *dilettanti* authors do cocker themselves up into a great jealousy of any thing that interferes with what they are pleased to call their fame : but I should as soon think of nursing one of my own fingers into a whitlow for my private amusement, as encouraging such a feeling.'

It was not until the year 1817, after the rising of the second morn on the mid-noon of his former fame, that Mr. Crabbe returned to the society of London, with which, more than thirty years before, he had been familiar in the persons of those, whose names will not perish so long as English history endures : and it is difficult to imagine what must have been his feelings, on comparing the present literary generation with his recollections of the past. He received a warm and cordial welcome in the highest intellectual and fashionable circles ; Campbell, Rogers, and Moore did homage to the living patriarch of English poetry ; and there were very few persons of talent and distinction, to whom he was not personally known. But these social enjoyments, however gratifying, do not seem to have elated him ; it is an interesting trait in his character, that the attentions which were lavished upon him were unknown to his family, until after his death. On his return from London, he pursued his usual occupations, as if they had undergone no interruption. This volume contains several letters, written by gentlemen of high literary fame, in which the writers have embodied their recollections of him at this period. On one occasion, at the urgent invitation of Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Crabbe visited him at Edinburgh. The reader will be interested in the following extracts of a letter addressed by Mr. Lockhart to his biographer, in which several circumstances, relating to this visit, are detailed.

' London, December 26, 1833.

' I am sorry to tell you that Sir Walter Scott kept no diary during the time of your father's visit to Scotland, otherwise it would have given me pleasure to make extracts for the use of your memoirs. For myself, although it is true that, in consequence of Sir Walter's being constantly consulted about the details of every procession and festival of that busy fortnight, the pleasing task of shewing to Mr. Crabbe the usual *lions* of Edinburgh fell principally to my share, I regret to say that my memory does not supply me with many traces of his conversation. The gen-

eral impression, however, that he left on my mind was strong, and I think, indelible ; while all the mummeries and carousals of an interval, in which Edinburgh looked very unlike herself, have faded into a vague and dreamlike indistinctness, the image of your father, then first seen, but long before admired and revered in his works, remains as fresh as if the years that have now passed were but so many days. His noble forehead, his bright beaming eye, without any thing of old age about it,—though he was then, I presume, above seventy,—his sweet and, I would say, innocent smile, and the calm mellow tones of his voice,—are all reproduced the moment I open any page of his poetry ; and how much better have I understood and enjoyed his poetry, since I was able thus to connect it with the living presence of the man !

‘ The literary persons, in company with whom I saw him the most frequently, were Sir Walter and Henry Mackenzie ; and between two such thorough men of the world as they were, perhaps his *apparent* simplicity of look and manners struck me more than it might have done under different circumstances ; but all three harmonized admirably together,—Mr. Crabbe’s avowed ignorance about Gaels, and clans, and tartans, and every thing that was at that moment uppermost in Sir Walter’s thoughts, furnishing him with a welcome apology for dilating on such topics with enthusiastic minuteness,—while your father’s countenance spoke the quiet delight he felt in opening his imagination to what was really new ;—and the venerable “ Man of Feeling,” though a fiery Highlander himself at bottom, had the satisfaction of lying by and listening until some opportunity offered of hooking in, between the links, perhaps, of some grand chain of poetical imagery, some small comic or sarcastic trait, which Sir Walter caught up, played with, and, with that art so peculiarly his own, forced into the service of the very impression it seemed meant to disturb. One evening, at Mr. Mackenzie’s own house, I particularly remember among the *noctes coenaeque Deûm*.

Mr. Crabbe had, I remember, read very little about Scotland before that excursion. It appears to me that he confounded the Inchcolm of the Frith of Forth with the Icolmkill of the Hebrides : but John Kemble, I have heard, did the same. I really believe he had never known until then, that a language, radically distinct from the English, was still actually spoken within the island. And this recalls a scene of high merriment which occurred the morning after his arrival. When he came down into the breakfast parlor, Sir Walter had not yet appeared there : and Mr. Crabbe had before him two or three portly personages, all in the full Highland garb. These gentlemen, arrayed in a costume so novel, were talking in a language which he did not

understand ; so he never doubted that they were foreigners. The Celts, on their part, conceived Mr. Crabbe, dressed as he was in rather an old fashioned style of clerical propriety, with buckles in his shoes, for instance, to be some learned abbé, who had come on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Waverley ; and the result was, that when, a little afterwards, Sir Walter and his family entered the room, they found your father and these worthy lairds hammering away, with pain and labor, to make themselves mutually understood, in most execrable French. Great was the relief, and potent the laughter, when the host interrupted the colloquy with his plain English “ Good morning.”

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‘All my friends, who had formed acquaintance with Mr. Crabbe on this occasion, appeared ever afterwards to remember him with the same feeling of affectionate respect. Sir Walter Scott and his family parted with him most reluctantly. He had been quite domesticated under their roof, and treated the young people very much as if they had been his own. His unsophisticated, simple and kind address put every body at ease with him : and indeed, one would have been too apt to forget what lurked beneath that good humored, unpretending aspect, but that every now and then he uttered some brief pithy remark, which showed how narrowly he had been scrutinizing into whatever might be said or done before him, and called us to remember, with some awe, that we were in the presence of the author of ‘The Borough.’

‘I recollect that he used to have a lamp and writing materials placed by his bedside every night ; and when Lady Scott told him she wondered the day was not enough for authorship, he answered, “ Dear Lady, I should have lost many a good hit, had I not set down, at once, things that occurred to me in my dreams.”

‘I could never help regretting very strongly that Mr. Crabbe did not find Sir Walter at Abbotsford, as he had expected to do. The fortnight he passed in Edinburgh was one scene of noise, glare, and bustle,—reviews, levées, banquets, and balls,—and no person could either see or hear so much of him, as might, under other circumstances, have been looked for. Sir Walter himself, I think, took only one walk with Mr. Crabbe : it was to the ruins of St. Anthony’s Chapel, at the foot of Arthur’s seat, which your father wished to see, as connected with part of the Heart of Mid-Lothian. I had the pleasure to accompany them on this occasion : and it was the only one on which I heard your father enter into any details of his own personal history. He told us, that during many months, when he was toiling in early life in London, he hardly ever tasted butcher’s meat, except on a Sunday, when he dined usually with a tradesman’s family, and



thought their leg of mutton, baked in the pan, the perfection of luxury. The tears came into his eyes while he talked of Burke's kindness to him in his distress: and I remember he said, "The night after I delivered my letter at his house, I was in such a state of agitation, that I walked Westminster bridge backwards and forwards until daylight."

For many years before his death, Mr. Crabbe underwent severe tortures from the *tic douloureux*, and the rapid approaches of infirmity gave warning, in the beginning of 1831, that the period of his departure was at hand. 'Mine,' says he, 'is an old man's natural infirmity, and that same old man creeps upon me more and more.' Early in February of that year, he died, after a few days of great suffering. The closing scene was marked by the same religious hope, which had shed a beautiful lustre over his useful and protracted life. He retained to the last, in the intervals of pain, that calmness and serenity, which viewed without terror the event he felt to be approaching; and he exhibited throughout that interest in others, which had bound many hearts to his. The testimonies of respect, that were freely paid to his memory by the people of his neighborhood, were of that character, which nothing but the loss of a good man would call forth, and nothing but affectionate veneration would bestow.

We ought not to omit to notice the manner, in which the life of Mr. Crabbe has been recorded by his son. He formed the plan of preparing a biography, some time previous to his father's death, and has not thought it expedient to alter that portion of it which was written in his lifetime. We think this a judicious resolution; this portion of the work is undoubtedly more animated and attractive to the reader, than it would have been had it been written in the immediate contemplation of the loss. There is little reason to fear, that the son has omitted any thing particularly worthy of remembrance; while he has certainly collected much, that would not easily have been accessible to others. On the whole, it will be regarded as a just and gratifying tribute to a man of superior genius and virtue, whose moral qualities command our veneration, while his poetical abilities will ensure him a high and permanent rank among the poets of his country.